

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

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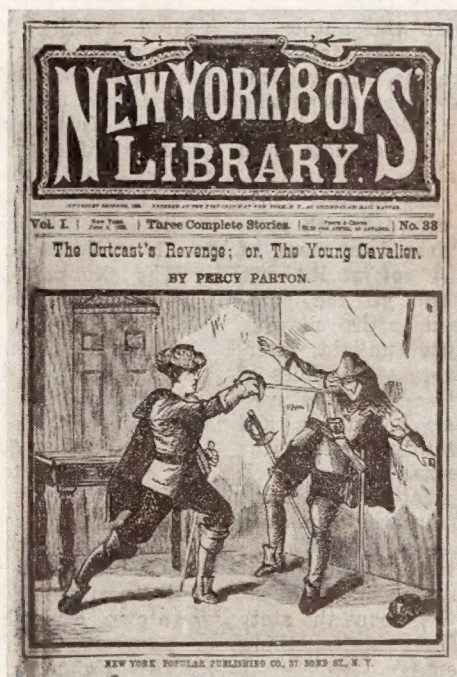
July 15, 1970

Whole No. 454

The Anatomy of Dime Novels

No. 19 Stories of Boarding School and College Sports

By J. Edward Leithead



DIME NOVEL SKETCHES NO. 127

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The Anatomy of Dime Novels

No. 19 Stories of Boarding School and College Sports

By J. Edward Leithead

Those super heroes of the diamond and the gridiron, of every kind of athletic game known to school and college, Frank and Dick Merriwell, had imitators galore. Imitation has been said to be the sincerest form of flattery, and perhaps this is true. Of course, some stories of sports appeared in dime novels before Gilbert Patten's long remembered Merriwell brothers came on the scene. Beadle's Half-Dime Library No. 581 was Double-Curve Dan the Pitcher Detective, or, Against Heavy Odds, by George C. Jenks (later the author of many Diamond Dick, Jr., tales). I have a copy before me, the woodcut illustration on the cover purporting to be a section of a ball park, vintage 1888; in fact—but let me quote from Chapter I Play Ball!—

"A baseball field day in New York. The Polo Grounds crowded with spectators. The grandstand a mass of faces and fluttering colors. Ribbons, flowers, feathers and all the paraphernalia of feminine attire showing brightly in the clear sunlight, interspersed with the more sedate hues of men's garments. Handkerchiefs used liberally for wiping hot faces, and fans waving incessantly to assist the gentle summer breeze.

"In the cheaper seats, where there is no protection from the sun, men and boys are packed closely and slowly cooking in the rays of Old Sol. It is a pretty hot day for baseball, but no one seems to think about the state of the weather. There is something else to interest them.

"It is four o'clock in the afternoon and time for the game to commence,

but there is a delay. The home club, the New Yorks, have no pitcher. Wilfred Noel, the regular pitcher, has quarreled with the captain and has positively refused to play in today's game . . . After a stormy scene with the captain he has taken a seat in the grandstand, where he can see what transpires in the field without being easily seen himself.

"Put on another pitcher!" howl the spectators. 'Throw Noel in the river!'

"The surly Wilfred scowls from his retired position in the grandstand. The match is one of the most important in the season's series. The Boston players are the opponents, and the New Yorks must play their very strongest if they hope to beat the famous team from the Hub today. The Bostonians are standing in a group at a little distance, waiting for the New Yorks to make some move.

"The situation is a desperate one. The vast assemblage, which had quieted down during the short conference between the umpire and the captain, breaks out into fresh yells of impatience. Jack Swift, the 'change pitcher,' feels his arm with his left hand and looks dubious. If his captain orders him to the front he will do his best, but he feels that it means certain defeat for his club.

"Jack, you must do it," finally decides the captain. 'Our other pitchers, Will Knox and Al Cratty, are both downtown somewhere and it would be impossible to find them now.'

"All right, captain, just as you say,' is Jack Swift's reply. 'Let us get into the field.'

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"The crowd cheers as the 'boys' get to their places around the diamond. It is Boston's first inning and one of the Hub's most powerful batters goes to bat. The New Yorks have taken the field and cover the bases as Jack Swift slowly leaves the players' bench and walks hesitatingly toward the pitcher's box. Then he stops and grasps his arm with a grimace.

"What's the matter?" asks the captain quickly.

"Cap, I'm afraid I can't go in. I'm certain when I pitch that curve my arm will give right out. And the only delivery I have is the curve."

"Wilfred Noel, behind his post in the grandstand, grins sardonically. The umpire, after a conference with the two captains, gives a reluctant nod and steps toward the noise-filled stand, from which come cries of 'Play ball!' 'Where's Wilfred?' 'Pitch yourself!' 'Bring on Jack Swift!'

"Ladies and gentlemen," the umpire commences in stentorian tones, "there will be no game today—" his words are all but drowned by uproar from the spectators.

"Suddenly a clear, youthful voice rings out above the din: 'I will pitch the game!'

"There is a cessation of noise as everyone turns to look at the speaker. A young fellow of twenty or thereabouts is making his way rapidly down over the seats in the grandstand. He clears the board fence that protects the spectators from stray balls and drops easily to the ground near the New Yorks' bench.

"I'll pitch the game," he repeats, as he strolls toward the group at the home plate, after dropping felt hat and coat on the players' bench.

"Can you pitch so that the New Yorks have a chance of winning?" the captain asks dubiously. "What's your name?"

"In the village where I come from they call me 'Double-Curve Dan—'

"That is enough," interposes the captain. "Go in and pitch. I don't know why but I feel that name will bring good luck to the New Yorks today."

"Dan nods, walks to the home plate

where the captain introduces him to the catcher, Lionel Lacey. 'You won't be long getting onto my delivery,' Dan tells Lionel. 'Let me throw a few,' and he takes up position in the pitcher's box. There is a short warm-up, then the umpire cries, 'Play ball!'

"Wilfred Noel, standing behind his post, fixes malevolent stare on the young pitcher. The ball is tightly gripped in Dan's fingers as the first batter faces him. Then, with a peculiar round-arm movement, he lets it go. The ball takes an erratic course, a sudden twist to the right and another to the left as it speeds toward the plate. The batter tries to meet it but it zigzags past him, into the hands of Catcher Lacey.

"Strike one!" cries the umpire.

"Another double-curve is delivered by the young pitcher, and then players and spectators begin to understand how he acquired the sobriquet. A minute more and the big batter of the Bostons is 'out on strikes.'

"The game goes on. It is impossible for the Bostons to hit Dan's double-curve and victory points in the direction of the New Yorks. Not by any great odds, however, for the Bostons are playing a splendid game; and now in the ninth inning, the score stands 2 to 0 against them, with Boston going to bat.

"Noel has seen the triumph of Double-Curve Dan with the feeling of rage he cannot repress. 'Curse him! This is not the first time he has crossed my path. I will fix him yet!'

"He sees that the zigzag balls are still bothering the opposing club, and that the New Yorks have an easy win in store, due solely to the young pitcher. 'If they could get one or two hits the tale might be different,' he mutters, as he sees the Bostons' best batter is facing Dan, waiting cautiously for a ball that he may have some chance of hitting.

"Two strikes, then a crack! of bat meeting ball . . . a great roar from the crowd. The big batter of the Bostons has at last hit Double-Curve Dan. He has sent the ball flying into right field, and, owing to a fumble by a

New York player, has made a home run.

"Two more Boston men fail to hit the ball but get on bases. The gloomy Noel grinds his teeth. Another Boston batter is up, one who has, all along, come near to hitting Double-Curve Dan. Now that the pitcher is a little nervous from the unexpected success of the big batter, the Bostons are more hopeful than ever.

"Dan poises the ball, sends it zig-zagging toward the home plate, just as a bright ray of sunlight strikes him full in the eyes and makes his delivery uncertain. But for that ray of light the ball would never have been touched by the batter. It was just enough to spoil the pitch . . . with a loud crack! the bat sends the ball again whizzing into right field, over the head of the fielder who fumbled the previous ball. A home run! Round the bases speeds the batter. There were two men on base and both are in!

"Quick with that ball! The fielder has whipped it up and plumped it into the hands of the pitcher. The Boston man is rushing from third base and Dan's arm sweeps forward in a throw to the home plate. But as the ball leaves his hand, that flash of sunlight again blinds him and the ball goes wide, eluding Lacey, allowing the Boston player to make his run in a long slide.

"What's the matter with you, Dan?" the captain demands angrily.

"Double-Curve Dan points to the grandstand, where, half-hidden by a post, is Wilfred Noel with a piece of looking-glass in his hand!

"THAT is what is the matter with me," says Dan quietly."

The first and most durable challenger to Frank Merriwell was Fred Fearnot, hero of *Work and Win*, *An Interesting Weekly for Young America*, started by Frank Tousey, Publisher, in 1898. Street & Smith had issued No. 1 of *Tip Top Weekly*, *An Ideal Publication for the American Youth*, in 1896. As against the Merriwell brothers' 850 originals, Fred and his chum Terry Olcott achieved a total of 732 originals, upping this

number to 1382 in 1924 by reprints.

Harvey K. Shackleford and George W. Goode wrote *Work and Win* under the pseudonym "Hal Standish." The earliest issues were somewhat imitative of Frank Merriwell's early adventures, but Fred and Terry worked out a routine of their own before long. Each number was adventure in a different setting, no continuity as in the Merriwell saga. Gilbert Patten's superb handling of his characters and what they did made *Tip Top* an outstanding publication, beloved to this day by collectors who read it as boys when it hit the newsstands every week. But *Work and Win* had—and still has—its faithful readers and admirers, too.

Fred stayed in athletics throughout the life of the weekly (and Merry was back on the slab in his old-time form as late as *Tip Top* No. 728 in 1919); Fred had a ranch (like Merry); he was head man in more than one circus, even ringmaster, and promoted two Wild West shows (unlike Merry); he was a temperance worker (Merry quite agreed with Fred on that issue); he operated in the stock market (more than Merry); the covers of Fred's *Work and Win* by Tousey's ace artist were bound to draw attention (and the same can be said of *Tip Top*'s artists, especially Charles L. Wrenn).

I'd like to quote from a football story in *Work and Win* No. 623, *Fearnot's Football Giants*, or, *Handling a Heavy Line*, dated Nov. 11, 1910:

"An enormous crowd gathered to see the game (between Fordham and Mount Vernon), for there was great sectional feeling. A number of New York newsmen were on hand to report the game. One of them came over to Fred and asked:

"Mr. Fearnot, I see that you are in football togs. Are you going to play with these boys?"

"I expect I am," replied Fred. "It has been sometime since I actually played in a game. Still, I guess I can make out to get through the game."

(To be continued)

RECENTLY PUBLISHED ARTICLES CONCERNING DIME NOVELS

THE UNIVERSITY OF TULSA MONOGRAPH SERIES NO. 9, 1970. Order from Monograph Series, University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74104. Price \$3.00. LITERATURE AS HISTORY: THE DIME NOVEL AS AN HISTORIAN'S TOOL, by William A. Settle, Jr. An essay on dime novels and their use in historical and sociological studies of the American scene during the time of their publication. Mr. Settle is a Roundup subscriber.

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, Boston, Mass. May 28, 1970. LITERAL WORD FACTORY, by Helen Langworthy. A short history of the Edward Stratemeyer "fiction factory" with a review of the dime novels that preceded him in the mass boys' fiction field.

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NEWSY NEWS

By Ralph F. Cummings

Heard from George French, and he is very sick, says he doesn't know what happened, but he slipped up somewhere. If he could only get back on his feet again, wouldn't it be wonderful.

Elmer W. Clason of Barberton, Ohio says his tomatoes are in blossom now. I wish mine were, but between the starlings (birds) and woodchucks, your editor won't have anything left.

Ernest P. Sanford of Silver Spring, Md., had a case of the virus, but is lots better now. He likes Rough Rider Weeklies as well as Medal and New Medal Libraries. Ted Strong and all. Also anything on Kate Greenwood.

Ed J. McNabb of Brooklyn, N. Y., sure likes to go over old story papers of long ago, as well as civil war papers and what-not. He sure is a great guy.

Charles Shepherd of Pittsburgh, Pa. (1020 Milton Ave.), wants some old books for customers, Algiers, Merriwells, Nick Carters, Dime Novels, books. What have you to offer—maybe he can use.

Gus Krause of Chattanooga, Tenn., is up in his 80's and feels like he was 30. He loves both cats and dogs. (Ye editor loves his cats too). Gus used to read all the old Tip Tops he could lay his hands on. He sure enjoyed them immensely.

Lou J. R. Kohrt says his place was broken open by burglars, and they stole a box of stamps, some silver watches his father and mother gave him long ago, and other things, and what a mess they made, drawers pulled out, and contents emptied on the floors. It's tough when anything like that happens—if he hadn't arrived home when he did, I guess he would of been cleaned out.

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

Dear Ed:

Wonder if you remember the old "KISS-ME" GUM that was around back in the 1900 to about 1920. Used to be wrapped square, 5 squares to a pack for 5c. Good gum too, I chewed

many a package, while reading an old novel.

Really like those pictures of the old novels on the Round-Up covers. Helps us old timers remember what they looked like, also I see many I never knew about at all. Like the Yankee 5c Library on May cover.

One hates to leave the house nowadays tho, with so many burglaries going on in this town. They got into my home on Mother's Day while I was out of town, stole quite a few valuables, but I think I interrupted them when I came home at 10 p.m. They evidently ran out the front door when I came in the back. By the looks of things they were just getting started, but they did get away with a very valuable antique old time clock a silver watch and few other things they grabbed as they went out. One thing I am thankful for, they did not take any of my novels, so far as I have noticed.

Lou Kohrt, Houston, Texas

WANTED

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